



JUDICIAL STANDARDS COMMISSION
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

FORMAL ADVISORY OPINION: 2014-01

January 10, 2014

QUESTION:

May a judge maintain membership in voluntary bar associations?

COMMISSION CONCLUSION:

The Judicial Standards Commission determined that a judge may maintain membership in a voluntary bar association so long as the organization promotes the bar in general and the legal profession as a whole, and is not essentially a law-related special interest group which promotes issues pertaining to the representation of a particular group of clients, such as criminal defendants, personal injury plaintiffs, criminal prosecution, insurance defense, etc..

DISCUSSION:

The Commission reasoned that membership in voluntary bar associations which promote the legal system and the administration of justice is to be encouraged, provided membership in such organizations does not call into question the judge's integrity, independence, and impartiality, which are the foundational principles of the judicial branch of government. While judges may attend seminars and conferences sponsored by voluntary bar associations, the Commission concluded that membership in organizations which primarily advocate for a particular group of clients, is inconsistent with judicial impartiality.

The Commission further reasoned that membership in gender, ethnic, and cultural based bar associations is permitted, so long as the entity does not practice unlawful discrimination.

References:

North Carolina Code of Judicial Conduct
Canon 1
Canon 2A
Canon 2B
Canon 2C

Canon 4
Canon 4A
Canon 4C